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Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis

JAPANESE ARMOR

JAPANESE armor, like that of European countries, reflects its time; it records the political and social evolution of the country, but unlike that of western lands does not change with the changes in the styles of civil dress. Beginning with the simplest head and body protection of heavy iron, its course runs parallel to that of European armor through a similar history of enrichment and the casting aside of unwieldy plates at the beginning of the XVIIth century in favor of a lighter harness. The style adopted at that time lasted with very little change until the final rejection of defensive body covering in the XIXth century.

The primitive character of the earlier armor is expressed in the term for breastplate, *oke-gawa* or "tub bark," and suggests what simple beginnings it may have had.

From the finds in the graves and dolmens of the dolmen period in Japan, which began in the second or third century before the Christian era and lasted until the seventh or eighth century after the Christian era, it is determined that the first armor known is iron; bronze weapons are found but no armor. The early iron helmets and breastplates bear the same relation to later harness that the protective covering of the Greeks and Romans did to that of Gothic Europe.

The early Japanese helmet and cuirass were formed of horizontal plates of iron held in place by rivets, thongs or cords. The helmet was a cap of low dome form in bands, like a collapsible drinking cup, with a shaped band running over the crown from front to back; perhaps a suggestion for the later *nihojiro* helmet with a silver plate before and behind; the *shihojiro* having an additional one on either side, and the *happojiro* with

eight such bands. The breastplate or cuirass was either in two sections of plates or lames having some slight reference to the form of the human body, or a built up wall with the means of getting in or out of it on the right side, as in the case of the later light armor. There were two parts to the gorget, and the lower part of the body seems to have been protected by plates having some relation to *bracconi*ere and *tasset* of western armor; there are no traces of arm and leg defenses.

Up to the end of the XVIth century, the time when the heavy metal armor began to change into the light weight style, there was little alteration in anything save details of construction and decoration, while the armor of the European countries was changing with every change in the civilian costume. Japanese armor was not intended to fit the man, but to give him a defensive shell that would turn the point or edge of his adversary's weapon and at the same time afford him a certain degree of freedom in the use of his own arms. The new, light weight harness consisted of a padded suit (richly brocaded when worn by a *Daimyo* or *Samurai*), covered with bands of small strips, arranged vertically, of tough bull hide, said to be from the shoulder of the working animal, covered with black lacquer, and strung together by silk cords. Certain parts were provided with chain mail (notably the arms), small plates of decorated metal, bosses, and badges. The corselet resembled a life preserver with an opening on the right side; almost literally a "tub bark."

Two suits of armor of this character have been acquired by the Museum within the past year. They are of the luxurious type of panoply. The finer and simpler one is a *hi-odoshi* or "red lacing," so called from the crim-

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son cords and braids that everywhere almost obscure the black lacquer laminae forming the body. The cords have been restored; but that must have been necessary after each battle, at least to such as took part in the actual fighting, and a suit and its owner were distinguished by the color.

It is the metalwork (helmet, mask and small pieces distributed about the suit) that constitutes the handiwork of the armorer. No doubt, as in western armor, chain mail was a separate industry; likewise the quilting and padding, the stringing and knotting. The metalwork on this hi-odoshi suit is beautifully done.

The particular flower in this instance is the chrysanthemum; it is the motive for the design on each plate and guard and is most delicately chased. The elbow and wrist guards are plates, in sentoku, of massed chrysanthemums and leaves, with pierced backgrounds. To the original metalwork have been added bosses with the mon of the Tokugawa family. This suit has little of that which to western eyes appears florid and exaggerated; it is clean in line, and when one considers the method of fighting which was in vogue at the time it was worn it is really appropriate.

Japanese warfare down to almost modern times, had little of the character of western fighting in masses and was more like a "set to" of individual duelists. Champion sought champion, announcing his own name and deeds and making references to the family history of his opponent, quite in the manner of Homer's Greeks and Cooper's North American Indians. One should bear in mind this method of fighting, dueling on a large scale, to understand the reasons for various parts of construction and decoration which would otherwise seem extravagant. The wide spread of shikoro or neck guard, we gather

from drawings and carvings, was sometimes used in the manner of a shield (real shields were never used), against a cloud of stinging arrows; there was also a closely woven silk curtain strung from the "horns" (tsunomoto) to entangle arrows, which were a terribly searching weapon; we are told of one warrior who had a "pull" of five feet with the bow; and Japanese bowmen did not loose the arrow from the centre of the bow but from the lower half. The mask also must have been a disconcerting feature in the fight; to be unable to watch closely the face of an antagonist is a disadvantage in dueling.

The nature of the material is also logical; it would be easier to shatter an iron plate than to cut through the many tough leather plates, pads and cords. The Japanese sword is conceded to be the finest steel, most keen edged weapon in the world; the resisting qualities of the armor have no doubt been closely studied.

The head-piece of this "great hi-odoshi" is rounded, with many fine ridges, the bombe in one piece; the aperture at the top, Hachiman-zu, is in sentoku, also the four Deva knobs. In front, between the horns, is a great dragon carved in wood and gilded.

In the second suit, a goshiki-odoshi or five color, the lames are strung with four shades of blue, orange, red, gray and black; the helmet is more conical, a shihojiro having four plates of sentoku over the black iron, with rows of studs; in front of the helmet is a lion in wood, gilded. It is not so trim a suit and is lacking in metalwork.

The hi-odoshi is ascribed to one of the Saotome family in the early part of the XVIIth century; one of the great family of armorers and metalworkers, the Miochin, who were armorers to the Court of Japan for six hundred years from the XIIth century to the XVIIIth century. The



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helmets of these armorers were usually made up of iron "gores" riveted together, the joints forming the ridges so characteristic; when in one piece, the ridges and studs were added. There is only one sword accompanying this suit; it is the katana, has the same mon but it is not at all certain that it has any particular connection with the armor. Its blade is ascribed to one of the Osafune smiths, Morikage of Byzen, in the XIVth century; the metalwork is very inferior, as to the chasing, compared to that of the suit.

CURRENT AND COMING EXHIBITIONS

January 14 to January 31: An exhibition of Wood Carvings, "Spirits of the Woods," by Charles Haag.

January 14 to January 31: A collection of Wrought Iron, by Thomas F. Googerty.

February 1 to February 28: Recent Accessions.

March 1 to March 15: An exhibition of the work of students in the St. Louis School of Fine Arts.

March 1 to March 31: A collection of Batik Decorations.

NOTES

At a meeting of the Administrative Board of Control, held November 12, 1920, Samuel L. Sherer, a member of the Board since June 5, 1912, and vice-president since May 8, 1914, tendered his resignation and was appointed Administrator of the Museum. Edward Mallinckrodt was elected vice-president to succeed Mr. Sherer.

At a meeting of the Board, held January 5, 1921, Frederick W. Lehmann was elected a member to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr. Sherer, and Hugo A. Koehler was elected a member to fill the va-

cancy created by the resignation of Thomas H. West, who had been a member of the Board since March 5, 1909.

THE ARDEBIL CARPET. The famous Ardebil carpet was on exhibition at the Museum from December 15th to January 7th, through the courtesy of the owners, Duveen Brothers of New York City. This carpet, which was woven in North Persia in the XVI century, is unusual in that it bears an inscription giving the name of the weaver, Maksoud of Kashan, and the date of completion, 1539 A. D. With the exception of a companion piece of identical design, probably executed at the same time, which is in the collection of the South Kensington Museum, no other example is known which is so signed and dated. These two carpets were made at the orders of Shah Ismail I., for the tomb of the Sheikh Sefi in the mosque at Ardebil. They are thus historic documents of the greatest interest, as well as among the most notable of the few early XVI century Persian rugs which have survived until the present day.

ATTENDANCE. The record of attendance for the year ending December 31, 1920, totaled 240,947, a gain of 13,578 over the previous year and the largest number of visitors since 1916, when the number was 252,560. The following schedule shows the attendance since 1909:

1909.....	104,585
1910.....	66,331
1911.....	115,925
1912.....	115,760
1913.....	142,101
1914.....	232,597
1915.....	168,962
1916.....	252,560
1917.....	225,374
1918.....	193,143
1919.....	227,369
1920.....	240,947